E L D E R

PAISIOS

1924 - 1994

THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

Η ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΗ ΠΑΡΑΔΟΣΗ

THE CLERGY AND THE CHURCH

ΚΛΗΡΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ

ΑΓΓΛΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ

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ELDER PAISIOS
(1924 – 1994)

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External Noise and Internal Peace

Text Editors: Mavrokefalos Anestis
Mobile: 6955319555
Fragelakis Panagiotis
Mobile: 6973740058

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ΒΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΟ ΣΗΜΕΙΩΜΑ

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The Blessed Elder Paisios, whose name in the world was Arsenios Eznepides, was born in *Pharasa* of Cappadocia on 25 July 1924. Shortly before his family left for Greece with the exchange of populations in 1924, the Elder was baptized by Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, who gave him his own name and foretold that "he was leaving a monk in his place." Upon arriving in Greece, his family settled in Konitsa of Epeirus where the Elder spent his childhood and young adult years.

From the time that he was a child, he lived an ascetic life, and was nourished by the lives of the Saints, whose feats he sought to imitate with great zeal and admirable precision. He practised unceasing prayer, cultivating all along the virtues of humility and love. He learned the trade of carpentry, wanting even in this aspect of his life, to imitate Christ. He fulfilled his military duty during the Guerilla War in Greece (1945-1949), serving for three and a half years in the Army as a wireless radio operator, and living ascetically even during this troubled time. During this time, he was distinguished for his valour, his ethos of self-sacrifice, moral integrity and many other virtues. Having fulfilled his duty to his country, he entered the

monastic life, which he had desired from his youth. Even as a layman, he had divine experiences, but the favour of the Lord, the *Theotokos* and the Saints intensified during his monastic life. He led an ascetic life on Mount Athos, in the Holy Monastery of Stomion in Konitsa, and on Mount Sinai in Egypt. He lived in obscurity, giving himself completely to God, and God in turn revealed him and gave him to the whole world. He guided, consoled, healed and granted peace to the multitudes of people who sought him. His sanctified soul overflowed with divine love and his saintly face radiated the divine Grace. All day long, he tirelessly gathered the human pain and imparted divine consolation.

He is the founder of the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti of Thessaloniki, Greece, which he also guided spiritually for twenty-eight years (1967-1994). It was to this Holy Monastery that he also entrusted and treasured the Holy Relics of his Godfather, Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, to whose memory a temple of Byzantine design was later erected.

After suffering excruciating pains, which, as he used to say, benefited him more than the ascetic struggles of his entire life, he fell asleep in the Lord on 12 July 1994, in the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti, Thessaloniki. He was buried next to the Church of Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian.

May we have his blessing, Amen.

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ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ

PREFACE

When the Blessed Elder Paisios fell asleep in the Lord on 12 July 1994, he left behind a spiritual legacy: his teachings. Ever a simple monk, with only an elementary school education, but rich in the wisdom of God, the Elder emptied himself for the sake of others. His teaching was neither instruction, nor catechism. He lived the Gospel, and everything he taught flowed naturally from his way of life, whose main characteristic was love. He had formed himself according to the Gospel and, for this reason, it was his countenance that taught first and then his evangelical love and enlightened word. When he received people of all backgrounds, he did not simply listen patiently to the problems they confided in him, but with his holy simplicity and discernment, he would enter deeply into their heart and make their pain, anxiety and trouble his own. And, then, gradually, the miracle would take place: the transformation of the person. He used to say, "God performs a miracle when we wholeheartedly participate in the pain of our fellow human beings."

We saw with great joy the interest generated by the first books that circulated on the life and teachings of the Elder Paisios. Many spoke with admiration about the

answers they found to their questions, the solutions to their problems and the consolation to their grief. Our joy was even greater when people who had distanced themselves from the Mother Church became rightly concerned and changed their way of life. We often thought of the words of the hymnographer referring to Saint Basil the Great: *He lives, though he lies asleep in the Lord; he lives even among us, as one who speaks through his writings*. At the same time, we felt a compelling need to offer the very beneficial words of Elder Paisios – which we were recording with reverence from the very first steps of our Sisterhood, because they were so helpful to us – to our brothers and sisters in Christ who were so persistently asking for them.

The Good God provided that our *Hesychasterion*[1] owe its very existence to Elder Paisios. It was he who received the Episcopal approval of His Eminence, Synesios, the Metropolitan of Kassandreia, to establish our Monastery and who sought to find the appropriate location. And he did this because his noble and sensitive heart felt great gratitude to us for having taken care of him when we first met him, in 1966, during a hospital stay for a lung operation. From that time on, he felt that he was our big brother and had the obligation to "provide for his sisters," as he used to say, by establishing the Monastery. The first Sisters were settled at the Monastery in October of 1967. Elder Paisios spent two months in the *Hesychasterion* to help in the organization of the coenobitic life. After that, he would come out of Mount Athos, usually twice a year, to help the Sisterhood in their monastic way of life and he would assist each Sister individually in her spiritual struggle, with his God inspired advice and his personal experience. From the Holy Mountain, the "spiritual America", as he used to call it, he continued to help them through prayer and the letters he would send to each Sister individually or to the entire Sisterhood.

1. *Hesychasterion* (pl. *Hesychasteria)* in Greece and outside Mount Athos is a Coenobitic Monastery in which the local Bishop has the right to intervene in spiritual matters alone, but not in administrative matters.

In 1967, when Elder Paisios started establishing the foundations of coenobitic life in the *Hesychasterion*, from the simplest practical things to the most spiritual, he was forty-three years old. He had already attained the mature manhood *to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph 4:13) and he had the wisdom of an Elder. From the first days of coenobitic life, we discovered that his words were *the words of eternal life* (Jn 6:68) and that much of what he said should be taken as an axiom for our daily life. For this reason, we felt compelled to write down his words so that they would not to be forgotten and could serve as a secure rule for monastic life.

After we filled the first notebooks, we submitted them with considerable hesitation to his judgment. We hesitated because the Elder always emphasized the practical application; he did not want us just to gather material, "ammunitions", without putting his words into action. He always asked that we cultivate spiritually whatever we heard or read. Otherwise, he used to explain to us, there would be no benefit from all writings and notes just as there is no benefit to a state when it has a lot of armaments but lacks a trained army that will put them in use. Relenting to our persistent pleas, he agreed to see our notes and

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to complete or correct any points that we had not understood correctly.

The recording of his spiritual counsels continued all along the twenty-eight years that the Elder was overseeing and guiding the *Hesychasterion*. All meetings of the Elder with the entire Sisterhood or the Monastery Council and the Abbess were recorded – initially by notes taken down by the Sisters and later by tape recorder. Also recorded were conversations between the Elder and each Sister separately, who wrote down his words immediately after her conversation with him was over. When Elder Paisios realized what we were doing, he was rather irritated: "Why are you taking this down?" he asked. "Are you saving it for an emergency? You should put it into practice; apply it. Who knows what you are saying in these notes! Let me see." When we showed him a sample, the notes of one Sister, his expression changed; he was comforted and reassured, and with satisfaction exclaimed, "My goodness! She is like a tape recorder! She wrote it exactly as I said it!"

Our conversations with Elder Paisios were usually in the form of answers to our questions. In his private conversations with the Sisters, the questions mainly concerned their personal struggle. In meetings with the Monastery Council, which were scheduled in advance, subjects were raised that concerned us during his absence. These were put in the form of questions to be discussed when he came to visit. These questions covered all kinds of subjects: administrative, practical, spiritual, social, ecclesiastical, national and so forth. Finally, in meetings of the entire Sisterhood, besides the questions raised by the Sisters, the Elder discussed various other topics,

which simply came up on the spot, in the course of the conversation. The Elder would use every word and image he could for the spiritual benefit of the soul. The sound of an aeroplane flying over the Monastery, the noise of a machine, the chirping of a bird, the opening of a door or a simple phrase could set him talking for a long time about a serious matter. "I put everything to use," he used to say, "in order to reach Heaven. If we approach and work on all things spiritually, do you know how much spiritual profit can be made and what spiritual experience can be acquired?"

In his contacts with people, Father Paisios sought to prepare them for the Kingdom of Heaven by helping them to know the will of God and come closer to Him. Thus, he put to practice one of his favourite sayings that "the Good God looks after us first for our next life and then for this life." When he mentioned something about nature, science, art or everyday life, he was not interested in these subjects themselves, but used them as parables in order to awaken souls, and to help them grasp the deeper meaning of life and "cling" to God.

Because his manner of speech was simple, spontaneous and full of natural humour, he could tell the greatest truths in a plain and joyful manner. "I am making sunshine," he used to say; he meant that just like the sun is necessary for the flowers to bloom, a gentle pastoral approach enables the opening and healing of the soul. This was his enlightened pastoral care, which often prepared the soil of the soul to receive the austerity of his words about the unyielding and steadfast evangelical truth. In this way, even his most demanding word fell

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upon the human heart as a beneficial dew, cultivating it and bringing forth spiritual fruit.

After Elder Paisios fell asleep, the material that was collected during these twenty-eight years, together with the letters that he had sent to the *Hesychasterion* from the Holy Mountain, was classified according to subject so as to be used everyday in the life of the *Coenobium*. Events relating to his life were also recorded, including those of a divine nature, to which he referred not for bragging but for spiritual charity. "I am not telling you this," he used to say, "so that you can give me ribbons, and bravos. When I tell a war story from the time of my military service, or anything else, even a humorous example, I do so to make a point, so that you can grasp its deeper meaning. I don't like talking about useless things." In this manner he made himself a "spiritual blood donor". He wanted to fortify our anaemic faith, trigger our *philotimo*[2] and, being the noble man of God that he was, to cultivate the same nobility in us so that we can become by grace akin to God. "More and more I am emptying myself," he used to say, "and what is the result? In order to help you, I am forced to speak about myself; this is such a waste, a spiritual waste! Does it at least help you? I want you to know that every time I have to mention an incident from my life, how, for instance, the Providence of God has helped me on a certain occasion, something is being lost; I feel emptier. Does it at least bear fruit for you?"

2. *Philotimo*, according to Elder Paisios, is the reverent distillation of goodness, the love shown by humble people, from which every trace of self has been filtered out. Their hearts are full of gratitude towards God and their fellow men, and out of spiritual sensitivity and a sense of honour they try to repay the slightest good which others do for them.

Taking into account the difficult years that we are living through, we decided to publish all this material in a series of volumes starting with those topics that would be of general interest. Although many of these topics are part of everyday life, they must still be faced according to the Gospel; otherwise, the consequences for this life but also for our future, eternal life will be sorrowful or worse yet, devastating.

In making this decision, we were encouraged by an idea that Elder Paisios had entertained for years. He wanted to write "a book that would reach everybody, laity, monks and clergy." The idea had never materialized, since he gave all of his time to the many hurting souls who came every day to his *Kalyvi*. He gave himself completely to them, despite his limited and diminishing physical strength. "My news," he wrote in one of his letters "is many tired and suffering people. The people and their problems are ever increasing. Please pray that my physical strength not decrease. I need to provide a bit for myself, because I must be always ready to help, whether I can or not."

As already mentioned, the Elder usually responded to a variety of questions. For this reason, when faced with the task of integrating the various topics that he had addressed on different occasions, we decided to keep the dialogue form. Included in these dialogues, are excerpts from letters he had sent to the Monastery, extracts of books that he had written, as well as any additional material from his correspondence with other brothers and sisters in Christ, who entrusted us with their letters and with notes they had kept in their conversations with the Elder.

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The aim was to give each topic the fullest possible coverage. Every effort was also made to preserve, as much as possible, the immediacy and the grace of his spoken words. Some repetitive remarks that stressed the deeper meaning of his word and pierced many hearts were retained, as well as many exclamations, which were a natural part of his story telling, coming from a heart that was pulsating with great love for God and humankind.

References to monastic life are frequent, not only because Father Paisios was addressing nuns, but also because he wanted lay people to seek "the joy of Monasticism" that springs from total surrender to God. He believed that in this way they might be saved from the insecurity caused by a total dependence on the self. He wanted them to enjoy Heaven in this life.

With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man is the first volume of the series *Spiritual Counsels* of the Elder Paisios of Mount Athos. In order to make its content more useful to the reader, it was divided into four thematic parts. Each part is subdivided into chapters and every chapter into sections with the appropriate subheadings. Footnotes that explain terms from the spiritual and monastic life will be more than familiar to those brothers and sisters in Christ who are well acquainted with patristic texts. They have been added in order to assist readers who lack this background.

As Elder Paisios made frequent use of examples from science, art and other fields, as noted above, we ran the risk of not rendering correctly some of his verbal terminology or expressions. For this reason, before publication, we

invited the review of certain sections and chapters from brothers and sisters in Christ who specialise in the relevant areas. We wish to thank them for examining this material with great reverence for the Elder and for making the appropriate corrections. We would, of course, be grateful for any additional suggestions.

We pray that "the spiritual waste" offered by the Elder out of an abundance of love, will bear fruit in the simple and good willing hearts of his readers, and that they will be enriched with the wisdom of God that is *hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes* (Lk 10:21).

Amen.

Sunday of All Saints, June 14, 1998

The Abbess of the Holy *Hesychasterion*
Mother Philothei
and the Sisters in Christ with me

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Orthodox Tradition

"Jesus Christ Is the Same, Yesterday and Today and For Ever"[1]

Geronda, people often talk about "Church renewal" as if the Church is getting old and needs to be rejuvenated!

– The Church ... getting old? Not quite. If you have a bit of piety and some good sense, you will not find satisfaction in novelties; this is why we see some people return to antiquity. They cannot, for example, be touched by modern icons, because they realize the value that an old icon has. And this only takes a bit of good sense. Now imagine if in addition to that, one has real piety! This should tell you how wrong they are who are calling for "renewal" and for all kinds of changes!

Today, even those who try to remain faithful to Tradition, who fast, abstain from work on Sundays and feast days, and are generally pious, are subjected to ridicule, "This fellow is out of touch! He lives in the past!" And if you dare say something, they will go on, "You are totally

1. Heb 13:8.

out of it! We don't do things this way anymore!" And soon enough Tradition and fasting and piety are turned into myths and fairy tales. But do you remember what the Gospel says? *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.*[2] There are those who cannot be faithful to Tradition; the least they can do is to say, "Forgive me Lord, I have sinned!" And God will be merciful. But that's not what happens. The piety and devotion of others make them aware of their own weaknesses and they try to impose their way to make up for that. It's like taking a possessed person and putting him in a spiritual environment. He will not be able to sit still or find rest, because he will be under pressure. Something similar happens in this case. These people are checked by their conscience; they know something is wrong and try to suppress it. And so they come up with all these remarks. They take old values and call them "status quo" and try to replace moral order with disorder. People act in perverse ways! When they see spiritual beauty, they take it as ugliness. Spiritual beauty becomes for them secular ugliness. Take, for example, a monk and cut his hair and beard short; you'll see how ugly he will look! Well, those who have a secular mind will not see that; they will find him beautiful.

Just turn around and see how they fight the Church and try to destroy Her. Let's say that they don't believe in God, and what they preach is atheism. But why do they refuse to recognize the many good things that the Church has to offer and are always against Her? This is really malicious. Why don't they acknowledge that the Church actually protects children, keeps them from turning into

2. Heb 13:8.

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little hooligans and teaches them to become good human beings? What these people do is exactly the opposite. They push children on an evil path; they give them free license to destroy themselves. And what does the Church teach? It teaches them, "to be prudent, to show respect to other people and be chaste, and grow up to be good and wholesome human beings." But this will not last; things will come around. In Russia, in a Church, an old lady was praying on her knees, next to a pillar. A young woman, a great scientist, goes up to her and says, "All these are old-fashioned." And the old woman turns to her and replies, "Right here, at this very pillar where you now see me weeping, you too will weep one day. The things of your world will come and go, and one day it too will come to pass, but Christianity will never go away, it shall never come to pass."

Respect For Tradition

When holy Martyrs did not know how to explain the doctrines of the Church, they would often say, "What I believe is what the Holy Fathers have taught." That was enough to lead them to martyrdom. You see, they could not defend their faith with arguments and persuade those that persecuted them, but they trusted the Holy Fathers. He would reason to himself, "How can I not trust the Holy Fathers? They were far more experienced and virtuous and holy than we are. How can I accept this nonsense and not protest when people insult the Holy Fathers?" We must trust Holy Tradition. The problem today is that so many embrace European courtesy and try to appear nice. They want to be viewed as open-minded and tolerant and

end up bowing to the two-horned devil. "We don't need many religions," they say, "one, universal religion will do." This way they want to level everything. Some of my visitors actually think this way. "Those of us who believe in Christ should form one religion," they once told me. "What you are suggesting," I replied, "is that we take eighteen carat gold that has been purified and separated from copper and mix it with copper again. Does this make any sense? Ask a jeweller, 'Does it make sense to mix base metals with gold?' So many have struggled to keep our Orthodox dogma pure and make it shine." The Holy Fathers were right to forbid relations with heretics. But today people don't see that, "We should pray together with the heretic, the Buddhist, the fire-worshipper, even the demon-worshipper," they say. "The Orthodox should participate in joint conferences and prayer sessions. It's important that we are present." What kind of presence are they talking about? They try to approach everything with logic and end up justifying the unjustifiable. If we follow the European spirit, we'll end up putting spiritual matters under a Common Market.

A few among the Orthodox, who are rather superficial individuals, seeking self-promotion in a self-appointed "mission", organize conferences with the heterodox to create a stir. They are supposedly promoting Orthodoxy, but all they do is bring in the heterodox and make a "mixed salad". This gets the super-zealots angry and they go to the other extreme; they blaspheme against the Mysteries of the New Calendar Orthodox, and so on and thoroughly scandalize souls who are full of devotion and Orthodox sensitivity. The heterodox on the other hand, come to these conferences, behave as if we all have to learn from

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them, and then take whatever good spiritual material they find in Orthodoxy, process it in their lab, add their own colour and label and present it as an original idea. And there are all kinds of strange people who are moved by such ventures, and end up spiritually damaged. The time will come, however, when the Lord will bring forth great figures like Saint Mark the Eugenikos and Saint Gregory Palamas. They will gather together all our scandalized brothers and sisters, to confess the Orthodox faith and secure the Orthodox Tradition, bringing great joy to the Mother Church.

If we lived in the spirit of the Church Fathers, we would be full of spiritual health, and become the envy of the heterodox; they would then abandon their ill-conceived beliefs and be saved without the need of preaching. As things stand now, our Patristic tradition does not move them, because what they are looking for is continuity; they want to see in us the presence of that spirit, a living relationship to our Saints. It's the duty of all the Orthodox to give the heterodox good reason to wonder, to lead them to realize their errors, so that they don't find rest in false beliefs. This way they will not be deprived of the many blessings of Orthodoxy in this life, and of the abundant and eternal blessings of God in the next. A group of young Catholic men came to my *Kalyvi*. They were very eager and interested to learn more about Orthodoxy. "Please tell us something that will help us spiritually," they said. "Look," I replied, "go and take a look at Church History and you will see how in the past we were united and then you took your own way and ended up where you are. Do this and you will be helped. When you are done, come back and we'll have plenty to talk about."

In the old days people had respect for what they inherited, they would hold on to their grandparents' belongings. I had come to know this very successful lawyer. His house was simple; not only family but also visitors felt at ease there. Once, he said to me "Father, a few years ago, my friends would make fun of my old furniture. Now they come and admire them as antiques. But I don't see them like that; I enjoy using them because they remind me of my father, my mother, my grandparents; I am really moved by them. To my friends, however, it's an entirely different matter; they collect old furniture and turn their living rooms into antique shops, and this somehow helps them forget and cope with life's stress."

In the past, one would inherit a tiny gold coin from his mother or grandfather and he would treasure it, as if it were worth a great fortune. Today, if someone has a King George Pound, and the exchange rate with a Victoria Pound is slightly better, he will sell it to make the difference. There is no appreciation, no consideration for the things that belonged to his mother or father. Add the influence of the European spirit, and you can see how all of us are slowly being swept away.

When I first went to the Holy Mountain, I met a very old and pious man, who was the Elder of a small fellowship of monks. Such was his reverence for his own Elders and spiritual predecessors, that he would keep everything they passed on to him; thus he kept not only their *kalymmauchia* (the monastic head coverings), but also the forms used to make them. He also kept old books and manuscripts of all kinds, carefully wrapped and locked in a bookcase to protect them from dust. "I am not worthy to read these books," he would say; "I just

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read the simple books, the *Gerontikon*, the *Saint John of the Ladder* (*Climakus*)." One day, this young monk came to stay with him – he eventually left the Holy Mountain. He would tell him things like, "What are you going to do with all this junk?" He wanted to throw away the casts or burn them. The poor old man started weeping, "This one is from my Elder," he would plead, "why are you bothered by it? We have so many rooms; can't you find a corner to put them?" He was so full or reverence, that he kept everything: the books, the heirlooms, the *kalymmauchia*, even those worn out casts! You see, if we have respect for the small things, we will respect the big things even more. But where small things are not respected, big things will not be respected either. This is how the Holy Fathers preserved the tradition of the Church.

Retain the Time Tested Practices of Monasticism

– Geronda, when a Sister who is new to a post finds a certain order in the way things are arranged, is it right for her to make changes?

– No, she should not start by making any changes, even if she is the only person working in that post. Some of the new Brotherhoods who moved into old Monasteries did that; they did not respect the old timers' experience. When people try to come up with their own programs and discard the old *Typika* – the time-tested rules that helped regulate monastic life – they not only show a lack of tradition, but what is worse, they show disrespect for tradition. Of course, eventually, they will come to realize how useful these rules are. They were put there to serve a purpose. The rules and

time-old practices of Monasticism are carefully weighed; they reflect centuries of experience. You see, we must respect the rules that govern a craft. I was a carpenter and I know that a regular table is eighty centimetres high and a step is twenty-seven centimetres wide. These are proven measures and an apprentice must accept them as they are; we don't need to explain them to him. They are the result of experience, and we must trust the craftsman and respect his expertise. People who don't respect the rules of a craft will not do their job right; they are going to end up making a table which is either too low or too high.

I have changed many *Kalyvia*; this makes me ... a *Kausokalyvites*.[3] Each time I made changes in the doors or the hooks, I realized that things had been put there for a good reason. This is why, whenever I move to a new place, I don't make any changes; even if I am uncomfortable with my surroundings. I won't even remove a single nail from the wall. The Father who was there before me, put the nails there for a reason; if, I, with no experience of the place, start taking them out, I will eventually have to put them back in the same spot and will ruin the plaster. Nails are there for a reason, to hang a sweater, a cassock. Once, I went to live in the *Kelli* of Saint Hypatios in Katounakia and I found thick walking sticks with curved ends on all corners. At first I used to give them out to people who came to visit me. But later, I realized that the Father, who had lived there before me, used the sticks to catch the snakes

3. Pun on the literal meaning of the term *Kausokalyvites* (hut-burner): a monk who constructs for himself a "*Kalyvi*", a hut from leaves and branches, lives in it for a time and then burns it and moves to another location. See the Life of Saint Maximos the *Kausokalyvites*.

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that would enter the room; there were many snakes and he wanted to have a stick handy every time he saw one.

The most important thing is to hold on to time tested things. Otherwise, tradition goes away and transgression sets in. Tradition (*paradosis*) and transgression (*paravasis*)! There's a huge difference between the two! Some would like us to make a tradition out of transgression. There are Monasteries today who do as they please and consider themselves traditional when in fact they are... "transgressional"! Now, how can there be spiritual discernment without spiritual sensitivity? You see, in Monasticism we must follow a different rule: not a military rule, or the rule of a movement, a cooperative and so on, but the time-tested rule of Monasticism, the rule set by the Holy Fathers. People will often use the term "patristic" as their own theoretical understanding of Monasticism and the Fathers, but this in reality is a pseudo-rule, the conception of those who have only read Patristic writings but not lived them.

Some new Monasteries today resemble charitable institutions. The only excuse I can think of is that when they started, they found very little in the manner of a foundation. Still, they could have sought the advice of older Monasteries. When Ottoman rule was over, the first Monasteries had no spiritual foundation. The Bavarians[4], who came to rule Greece under King Otto, tried to eliminate them and confiscate their property. They even issued a decree that monks should get married – an effective way to dismantle Monastic communities! That was one

4. A native or inhabitant of Bavaria, which was a region and former duchy and kingdom of southern Germany.

problem. We, on the other hand, failed to search for past examples and see how Monasticism was practised in our tradition. People, for instance, noticed that Monasteries had cows, calves and so on, and they concluded "That's what Monasticism is all about, raising cattle!" But the reason that Monasteries kept animals was because during Ottoman rule, people would donate their livestock and property to Monasteries to keep them from falling in the hands of the Turks. It was to the Monasteries that the people would go to find food and shelter and support from all sorts of difficulties and dangers. It was there in the Monasteries that the people, especially the poor and the suffering, would find help and consolation. There were no charitable institutions at that time, and so monks had to take care of both animals and people. Later, things changed and Monasteries retained only one of these practices; they continued to raise farm animals. There were some among the spiritual men of that period that concluded, "This, unfortunately, is our Monastic tradition!" And they went looking to Western models of Monasticism, borrowing from them the whole idea of missionary work. They did not go back to our tradition to check; neither did they reason, "Well, that's what Ottoman rule bequeathed to us. Monks could not live an authentic monastic life under those circumstances. What we see is a remnant of this unhealthy situation. It's now time to go back to our true tradition." But instead of going back to our tradition, they went back to a Western model! They sought examples from that direction and tried to apply them here. This is the mistake they made; they did not go back to our tradition. You see the Turks had great respect for the *vakoufs* (religious charitable foundations), because

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they often benefited from our Saints; they would even witness miracles and visit our Monasteries seeking God's help rather than mere hospitality.

They Will Go Back to Tradition

Christians are holding on to their faith, to the honour of the Church and they recognize Her grandeur. The day will come when others will appreciate their dedication. You'll see; people will start going back to tradition. That's exactly what happened with Orthodox iconography; there was a time when Byzantine art was not properly understood and frescoes in many Churches were hammered away. People sought to get rid of the old plaster, and replaced it with painted Renaissance style images. Now, after all these years, the value of Orthodox iconography is widely recognized. Old frescoes are uncovered and restored by people who are not necessarily motivated by piety or belief in God; some of them are atheists. The same will happen with us. The things that we discard today as useless will be sought by others in the future.

Have you noticed how Byzantine music is making a comeback? Even young children are now studying it. A few years ago, you would have a hard time finding people trained in Byzantine music. But now, when they see young children studying it, many begin to wander. Oh, the sweet "turns"[5] of Byzantine music! When it's authentic Byzantine, they are so beautiful, so very sweet.

5. The Elder used the word *gyrismata* (γυρίσματα) to refer to the stylistic «turns», that is, the vocal melodic patterns or variations of Byzantine music, which are usually indicated with the characters of quality or expression and which contribute to the adornment and beauty of melodies.

Some sound as fine as the voice of the nightingale, others are soft like lapping waves, and yet others are full of grandeur. Everything is meant to stress and convey divine truths. But such chanting is hard to find. Most people will sing half-way, in bits and pieces, in stylized ways. There are gaps in their singing, holes! And worst of all, they will chant without inflection. Can't they read the marks on their books? It's like modern grammar that has done away with accent marks and so people's reading has become flat. No matter what they say, it sounds the same – as if the words have been steam-rolled flat! "*Pa-Ni-Zo*", "*Pa-Ni-Zo*", you hear them chant, but nothing comes out of it![6] Some will stress a tone but without emotion and end up shrieking. Others will stress a tone so hard and do that with every tone, as if they are hammering nails rather than chanting! It's true! Their chanting is either too harsh or too flat. When you hear them, you don't feel anything inside, you are not moved.

Now, take authentic Byzantine music; it's so peaceful, it soothes the soul. To chant right, our inner spiritual condition must be right. It is then that what reaches our ears is divine bliss! Christ fills the heart and the heart rejoices, and we turn and speak to God with a heart full of joy. And when we chant from the heart, our heart is transformed, we feel the change and so do others around us. Some years ago, an experienced chanter visited the Holy Mountain and he ended up getting really embarrassed. The Fathers there chanted in the traditional way. So they invited him to chant with them, but he could not sing the "turns", he did not know how. But for the

6. *Pa*, *Ni* and *Zo* are notes used in Byzantine music.

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Fathers, the *Haghiorites*, that was common knowledge. When he left, he started thinking about his chanting. The same thing happened to other chanters. So, they became concerned, they did their research, studied, listened to old traditional masters and learned all about the "turns" that chanters used in the past.

When the Turks arrived in Asia Minor, they found Byzantine music and adopted it. This is why Turkish *amanedes*[7] are so moving, and our people have this saying: "When you sing, sing in Turkish; when you speak, speak in French, when you write, write in Greek." I am not saying that all Turks sing this way or have great voices, but when they sing, they put their heart in it, they sing with feeling and emotion. But some of our people have no idea that the *amanedes* are of Byzantine origin, and they say that our Byzantine music was influenced by Turks. But the Turks, when they came from the depths of Asia had neither music nor anything else, and so they borrowed the music of Byzantium.

– Geronda, how can Catholics find the organ spiritually satisfying?

– How? Well, they wanted "popular" music! That's the answer! Remember those Catholic nuns in France who were singing *Christ is Risen*, and were dancing to modern music with an icon in their hands? In their mind, they were celebrating ... Easter!! It was their abbess who was carrying the icon! It was renewal they wanted, and look where that got them. I remember once I heard this young monk chant a Doxology, and it sounded a bit strange. "Wait

7. An *amane* is a slow, mellow song from Anatolia, which often repeats the word *aman*, an exclamation suggestive of pain, anguish and suffering.

a minute," I thought to myself, "what is he chanting?" So I asked him, "Who composed this Doxology?" "Petros the Peloponnesian," he replied, "but I have made some corrections." "You have made corrections?" I asked. "Well, yes, don't I have the right to do that?" was his response. "Sure, you have the right to compose your own Doxology," I said to him, "but you don't have the right to destroy someone else's." I am sure he would make these changes and then claim, "It's from the Holy Mountain"! We need to be very careful not to dilute our tradition. If people want to, they can compose their own chants, put their name on them; that's their right. But they cannot take old chants and dilute them; that's irreverence. It's like someone with no knowledge of iconography trying to restore an old icon. He is free to paint his own icon, but not to destroy someone else's.

Take Faith Away and the World Will Crumble

Many had been in favour of abolishing religion, because they believed that religion is the cause of all our troubles. But now, they have come to realize that if faith is taken away from man, he turns into a beast, nothing can restrain him; take away ideals and man will crumble. A journalist once visited an old communist politician and asked him, "What must our politicians do today to succeed, and what must they avoid if they don't want to fail?" And he replied, "The reason we have failed is because we went after the Church." That is to say, Communists who do not believe, who have neither a materialistic interest nor a spiritual aspiration, realized

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that they cannot go against God. In some parts of Serbia,[8] they have started building Churches because they noticed that, where there are Churches, there are fewer cases of mental illness, lower crime… It's not out of faith that they have built them, but out of expediency; instead of medicating people, they are making Churches for them. Even Ceausescu, the Romanian dictator, a shameful man, would preach against Christianity calling it the opiate of the people, but still admit that Christians are good people. When human beings believe in God, they live orderly lives and don't create trouble. It's those who don't believe in anything that will resort to violence. Russia will give us many Saints! People are now turning against Communism and communists try to justify its crimes: "Lenin and Marx," they explain, "agreed with the ideas of Christ, but could not understand His spirit fully, and that's why they committed crimes and so on." They are trying to deal with Christian unrest. Christians in these countries are demanding, "We want to return to our tradition, to our Orthodox faith." And they must conform to this request, because otherwise the public will turn against them. So they echo this demand, "Let's return to our old ways, our tradition"! If you were to believe them, the reason they committed all these crimes during the Russian Revolution, was because they had not understood properly the spirit of Christ's teachings!

A day will come when those who govern, even if they themselves have no faith, will realize that if religion is not brought back, human society will crumble. In fact, they will impose some religion on people to create order

8. This was said in June of 1985.

and make governing easier. In the future, those that skip their prayers even for a day will be sent to prison! The state will hold us accountable! In time, eventually, things will come around to their proper position.

We Must Leave a Good Legacy

– Geronda, why is it that in some parts of Greece, one will find a large number of good people?

– Well, probably because good people lived there once and built a good legacy, and others are now following in their footsteps. It's not the soil that makes the difference! You see, when a certain town or region creates a good tradition, or even a bad one, a legacy is left. Up in Epeirus, there was a village near the Albanian border, where the villagers would attend every single service, Vespers, the Divine Liturgy, even *Apodeipno*. It was as if they already lived in Heaven; it was a heavenly life on earth that will continue for them in Heaven. And so they not only helped themselves, but future generations as well, by bequeathing to them a good legacy. This is something that can be inherited; people find it ready, waiting for them and carry on with it. Now, there was another village nearby, where people had the habit of stealing. Even their priest, the only priest that ever came from that place, would steal icons from the Church! So, it was not the soil that was to blame, but the people's bad habits. This is what they passed on to other generations, even up to this day. It will take a lot of hard work to change things there and create a good legacy. It's interesting, isn't it, that when someone has a bad character people will try and persuade you that he is not really from their town;

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that he is somehow a stranger to their part of the world. But take a Saint, and everybody wants to claim him as their own! Take for instance, Saint Cosmas Aitolos; he comes from the southern part of Greece but people here in Epeirus, call him an Epeirote because his father was born in a village, at the *Grammenochoria* of Epeirus. No matter what the facts are, and what a Saint wants, people will try to claim him as their own!

I met a family man, once, who used to move one of his fingers nervously every time he spoke. His kids would do the exact same thing when they spoke! Children will imitate their parents' habits; they will copy them exactly. What matters the most is that they copy the good things; otherwise, bad habits will be passed on and perpetuated. I remember this man who had entered an *idiorythmic* Monastery to become a monk, but did not feel at ease there. "Stay a while, my son, and things will change," his Elder would advise him. "Geronda, how is that possible?" his "son" replied. "The disciple of Elder so and so is exactly like his Elder; and the disciple of that other Elder is also exactly like him. So, how will things ever change?" When there is a bad habit in a Monastery or in a community, and young monks show little concern and just go about copying what they see, they end up perpetuating what is wrong. If, on the other hand, they show appropriate concern, then it's possible for a bad practice to change and be replaced with something good. This way both good and bad habits can be perpetuated.

What I have come to realize is that all the things that have come down to us, either from the Fathers or from the *Typika* (the ancient rules and practices), are like remnants of the harvest. It is so important for us to be careful and

make sure that we hold on to the yeast for future use. This is our Christian responsibility; we have no right to leave behind a bad legacy.

A few years ago, in Geneva, there was a gathering of theologians and University professors in preparation for a synod.[9] Noting that most people don't observe the fasts of Christmas, of the Holy Apostles and the Great Lent, they recommended doing away with the first two and reducing the Great Lent fast by two weeks. Some professors from Greece were also at this conference. When they came and told me about their recommendations, I was very upset, I was beside myself. "Don't you realize what you are doing?" I said to them. "If someone is sick, he is allowed to eat; there is no rule against it. If someone is not sick but breaks the fast out of weakness, all he needs to do is humble himself 'Forgive me, Lord', he should say, 'I have sinned.' Christ will not hang him alive for breaking the fast. If he is not sick, however, he should not break it. Of course, there are also those who don't care about fasting to begin with. So, everything falls into place. But if we do away with the fasts in order to please those who don't care to keep them, what is going to happen with future generations? It could be that they will be better than us in observing the fasts! But still, what right do we have to do away with them especially since they pose no problems?" Catholics only fast for one hour before Holy Communion. Are we going to follow in that spirit, blessing our weaknesses and falls? We don't have the right to fashion Christianity according to our weaknesses. Even if those who observe the fasts are few

9. This was said in 1992.

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won't be just the written things that we will know, but also the thoughts in the minds of those who write them. Do you see what I am saying? This is the work of divine illumination, and all of man's activities are enlightened.

How can we abandon the legacy that Christ left for us? We don't have the right to do away with it! God will hold us accountable. You see, this small nation of ours, believed in the Messiah, and God gave us the blessing to enlighten the whole world. The Old Testament was translated into Greek one hundred years before the coming of Christ. Think of how the first Christians suffered! Their lives were constantly at risk. Nowadays, there's so much indifference! And yet, it would be so easy for us to enlighten other nations today! We owe the peace we enjoy today to those who came before us. Do you know how many of our ancestors sacrificed their lives? We owe everything we have to them. I compare them with us; they kept their faith even though their lives were in danger; our lives are not at stake, but we let go of our faith and in return we destroy all they have bequeathed us. Those who have never had the experience of being subjugated to another nation do not appreciate my advice. "May God protect us from barbarian invaders and their wrath," I tell them. "Why," they reply, "what's going to happen to us?" Listen to their attitude! Oh, why don't they go away! That's the kind of people you run into these days. Give them money and cars... that's what matters; they couldn't care less about faith, honour, or even their own liberty.

We Greeks, the Hellenic nation, owe our Orthodox Christian Faith to Christ and to the holy Martyrs and Fathers of our Church. We owe our liberty to the heroes of our Homeland, who shed their blood for us. And so,

we owe it to them to keep this holy legacy alive, and not let it disappear or destroy it ourselves. What a great shame it would be if our nation perished! And just as in war individuals are drafted to serve their country, so too in our days God is sending personal invitations to people, drafting them to safeguard and save His creature. God will not abandon us, but we need to do our part too. We need to do what is humanly possible, and for the rest, turn to God and pray for His help.

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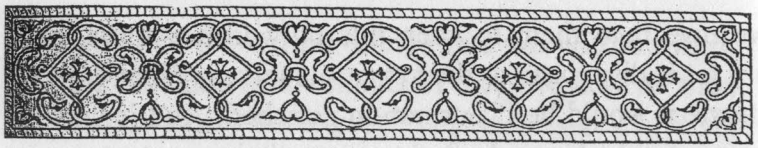

CHAPTER TWO

The Clergy and the Church

Geronda, why haven't you become a priest?

– The point is to be saved. The priesthood is not a means to salvation.

Did anyone ever suggest that you become a priest?

Yes, they put pressure on me many times. When I was in a *Coenobitic* Monastery, they pushed for me to become a priest and take the *Great Schema.* But what I always wanted was to become a monk in my inner life. That's wnat interested me; nothing else. When I was young and lived as a layman, I had experienced divine things and when I eventually entered a Monastery I thought, "All I need is to live the monastic life." That's where all my efforts went; taking the *Great Schema* or being ordained a priest did not really matter to me. Recently, I was visited by someone at my *Kelli* of *Panagouda*, and he insisted that I become a priest. He actually went to the Oecumenical Patriarchate for this purpose, and met with the Exarchy when he returned to the Holy Mountain. But they told him, "Why don't you tell him yourself; if we make the decision for him, he may flee." So, he came and told me. I was really upset when I heard what he had done, but then he went on. "Why don't you at least become a priest, so that you will be able to read the prayer of forgiveness since all those people who come to see you do not only tell you their problems but also confess their sins? After all, weren't you telling me yourself, about the confusion that is created because people will sometimes say things differently or will confess only half of what you instructed them to confess to their Spiritual Fathers or to bishops? Become a priest! This way you will be able to hear their confessions, read the prayer of forgiveness, inform them of the remission of their sins, having their lives restored in a good spiritual state." The poor fellow said these things with every good intention, but this was not for me.

– Geronda, what must one do when others pressure him to become a priest, but he feels that he is not up to it?

– He should speak his mind. No one can be forced to accept the priesthood or the *Great Schema.* But if he accepts it out of obedience and with humility. and adds a bit of *philotimo* and a little love, then, God will take care of the rest and He will fulfill whatever is lacking. Keep in mind that people can discern whether a man became a priest out of love of God and a desire to serve His Church, they have this criterion that never errs. There are those who want the priesthood in order to glorify themselves They will be overcome with difficulties, because Christ will not help them, unless they first humble themselves and repent. But those who sought the priesthood for spiritual reasons will have Christ on their side, in difficult times. It's far better if a man is pressured by others to become a priest, if it is the Church that wants him there and the people, because then he will have the protection

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of Christ and when difficulties come, he will have both the people and Christ on his side.

Those in the clergy who planned all along to become priests and did so according to their plan, are few and far between. I don't take them into account. Most priests have the right intention in the beginning, but then the devil gets involved, vainglory and an obsession with high office take charge of the person, and whatever good intentions he might have had are soon forgotten. We have now reached the point where some priests who want to lead a parish or become bishops and so on, will go as far as asking their connections to intervene on their behalf You see, when they started they were running for Christ; now they are running for the gold... They crave for golden crosses, golden mitres, diamonds, and anything you can imagine except the essentials. It is so easy for the devil to deceive us when we are not watchful!

– Geronda, what does God want from a priest? What should people expect from him?

– What God wants from him is too profound to touch on right now. Now let's talk about what people want and expect from a priest. In the old days, the priests lived an ascetic life, they were virtuous and holy, and naturally people felt a reverence for them. Today people want two things from the priest: to be disinterested in money and to have love. When they find a priest who has both, they consider him a saint, and then they will run to Church. By finding their way to the Church, they also find their salvation. Then God will condescend and the priest will also be saved. It is so important for the priest to be a man of great purity.

The devil goes after the monk and tries to weaken his spirit with all kinds of petty schemes; his purpose is to render him useless and deprive his prayer of spiritual power. If the monk wishes to have the Grace of the Holy Spirit, he must be a true monk. He will then have spiritual authority and can help others very positively with their prayer. By contrast, a priest may not be spiritually sound, but he will be helped in celebrating the Holy Mysteries of the Church and giving blessings to people, by the authority granted to him through ordination. In fact, even if a priest has killed someone, the Mysteries he performs will still be effective, until he is defrocked. But if a priest has a sound spiritual state, then he is a true priest and able to help people more.

When priests and those who have pastoral duties ask me how they can help their parishioners, the thing I stress the most is this: they should labour spiritually in order to cleanse themselves by performing their spiritual duties and by going beyond duty so that they build a spiritual reserve for times of need. Spiritual work on ourselves is actually a silent work on our fellow human beings; it is work that instructs by example and causes others to imitate the good behaviour they see in us and correct their faults. If we want to work for the good of others, but have not accumulated enough spiritual wealth to live on the spiritual interest we make, while we work without pay for them, we will end up the most miserable and pitiful of people. For this reason, whatever work we do on our spiritual life, should not be considered a waste of time. We may need to work for a short while or for a long time, even for a lifetime, but the important thing is to work, because this mystical labour will preach the word of God

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mystically into the souls of people. Those filled with the Grace of God will transmit divine Grace and change those who live carnal lives. He liberates them from the tyranny of the passions and in so doing he brings them closer to God where they find salvation.

The Priest Will Be Held Responsible

A priest can never shut his door to people; his is a grave responsibility. Some are desperate, others sick and in need, some are dying; he must accept everybody, go wherever he is needed. A priest cannot deny his help. Souls are in danger and he must be there to help them. For if he leaves them helpless and God takes them unprepared, will he not be held responsible? A monk, like me, can shut his door, leave for the desert and disappear somewhere, and help people from there with his prayers. You see my job is not to solve the problems that people bring to me but to pray for their salvation. That's why I did not become a priest or a Spiritual Father; I wanted to help people in a different way. If I lived in the world as a priest, my door would always be open. I would have to respond to every need at all times, help everybody equally, no matter what their situation. I would first need to take care of my parishioners and devote whatever time was left to other people who sought my help. I would be interested not just in the faithful but also in those who had no faith, the atheists, and even the enemies of the Church. Or, if I was a Spiritual Father, and someone accused another person to me, I would have to get the two of them together to try and figure out what's going on. I would pick up the phone to find out how someone else was doing, who had

a temptation, or faced a certain problem and so on. How would I ever have peace of mind?

A priest must lead the way, and the faithful will follow. In a flock, the ram will always lead the way and the sheep will follow. When its horns are turned right, the entire flock goes in that direction. Sheep follow the ram, their leader. You will not see them apart, but always one following closely behind the other. The ram gives the direction and they follow.

– Geronda, when a priest, an abbot or anybody with pastoral duties happens to love a good and kind soul more than one that is always difficult and demanding, is that acceptable?

– Well, say for example that you are a shepherd and you have a large flock. Some of your lambs are grazing cheerfully and bleating away, while others are sickly or have a leech on them and move away to the edge of the field. Which ones would you take care of more? Wouldn't you take care of the sickly ones? Or, suppose that a jackal attacks them and they start crying; aren't you going to leave the ones that are quietly grazing and bleating, and rush to those that are being attacked and are wailing? A shepherd will care more for the sick or injured lamb, and will look after it until it recovers. We must do the same. Whether they are performing miracles or having been wounded by our enemy, the devil, we must have them all in our heart, in the very same place; we should not have scorn in our hearts for wounded souls. In my life, I have felt much more love and pain, and have been more concerned, for those who had a difficult life and struggled to overcome their passions, than for those who are not tormented by passions. When love for the other person is deeply rooted

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in our heart, they can sense it; they are informed, because love and divine Grace bring sweetness and radiant beauty to our demeanour, which are impossible to hide.

Pastors, whether they are priests or bishops, would do well to think of Moses and the troubles he went through caring for the great multitude of his complaining people. Imagine how much he must have prayed for them out of love and what he, himself, suffered wandering for years in the desert, waiting for God to lead them to the Promised Land. All they need to do is think of Moses, and this will give them loads of courage to suffer through their troubles without complaint, thinking all along that they pale in comparison to the troubles that Moses faced.

The Secularization of the Clergy

– Geronda, during the summer months when it's so hot, is it still necessary for the *Ecclesiasticos*[1] to serve in the church, wearing the mantle? I find it so difficult.

– Oh, monastic life these days... What can I say? Saint Athanasios would wear a thick garment and a very heavy cross as part of his ascetic discipline, and look at us today! When I was in Australia, I even saw a sacristan in shorts. "This is perfect for the beach," I told him. "It makes my job more comfortable wearing shorts," he replied. People start thinking this way and end up saying, "Let's get rid of our black cassocks, they're so hot in the sun!" Is the mantle in your way? Throw it away! Is your head-scarf a nuisance, because it makes you sweat? Throw it away!

1. *Ecclesiasticos* is the monk or nun who is in charge of Church maintenance and who assists during divine Services.

That is where we are heading. Now let's get serious! If you get hot, wear lighter clothing underneath. We can all manage to do that.

– Geronda, should someone take off the cassock and wear only the mantle?

– And the priests should remove their under cassock (*anteri*) and wear only their pants? Well, what can I say? The mantle is the proper garment of the monk. It is granted to all those who wear the cross and bear the *Great Schema*. During the tonsuring of a new monk, the mantle is worn by the sponsoring senior monk, who, after vesting the new monk with the cassock, removes his mantle and places it upon him. I was really impressed by the fact that some women in Alexandria, Egypt, where it gets very hot, would still keep their tradition and be dressed in black. And here we are, having such a hard time bearing the cassock, which has been bequeathed to us by our Fathers.

– Geronda, people will often remark, "But is it really the cassock that makes one a priest?"

– Well, for example, take a look at two olive trees, one with leaves and the other without. Which one of the two do you prefer? The one with leaves or the one without leaves? Once when I was at the *Kalyvi* of the Holy Cross, I peeled the trunk of an olive tree and wrote this on it, "The trees have shed their garments, now we'll see their progress!" Next to that I wrote, "A priest without his cassock is without his virtue too." At that time the cassock issue was being discussed in many circles, and some priests would come to me to get ... a blessing to remove them!

– Geronda, someone brought to the Monastery an Orthodox priest who was not wearing his cassock. Should we have asked for his blessing?

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– What kind of blessing would you get from him? You should have told the person who brought him, no matter how important he was, "Forgive us, but it is our Monastery's rule that priests wear a cassock. It is not appropriate for a priest to come to an Orthodox Women's Monastery and wear only his pants." You see it's simple: when the person who brought him has no shame, and when the priest himself is not ashamed for having come without his cassock, why should you be embarrassed to ask him to put one on? I met a young archimandrite once, at an airport; he was wearing layman's clothes. He was going abroad and introduced himself "I am Father so and so," he said. "Where's you cassock?" I replied. Of course, I did not do a prostration.

– Geronda, some people claim that it will be good for the clergy to modernize.

– When Patriarch Demetrios visited the Seminary of the Holy Cross in the United States, a few pious American students went up to him and said, "Your Holiness, don't you think it's time for our clergy to be more up to date?" The Patriarch's response was, "Saint Cosmas said that when clergy turn into laymen, laymen will turn into demons." He gave them a good answer, didn't he? When the Patriarch saw the luxurious hotel suite he was to stay in, he remarked: "Is this where am I staying? It is better to get me a simple cot. When the clergyman is secularized, he becomes a candidate to evil."

– Geronda, should we make sacred vestments a little simpler? Are ornate and embroidered vestments harmful to priests?

– The honourable thing for you to say in such circumstances is, "We usually make this type of simple vestments.

We could do more embroidery, but we avoid it because we are troubled by the thought that people will see them and be scandalized. People who have no faith will take advantage of this. For instance, we hear some say, 'We have no bread to eat and the priests have all those sets of vestments.' " Serious priests will be interested in simple vestments and they will appreciate your work. Priests with a secular mentality will become embarrassed. But, then, you too will become embarrassed if you make the embroidery very ornate. You should use more embroidery only for the covers of the Holy Altar and of the Holy Gifts. But you should avoid placing crosses too low on the *sticharia* and the *felonia.* Place some other symbol there. Priests should not have to sit on the faces of the Saints, on crosses… This would be irreverence.

"Which of You Convicts me of Scandal?"

– Geronda, is divine Grace lost from a priest who has committed a mortal sin?

– No, how can it be lost? Divine Grace may "depart" from a priest, but it cannot be lost. If a priest is suspended from his duties, he retains the priesthood, but the Mysteries are no longer activated through him. He has lost his power and authority. The main thing is Grace. If Grace is reinstated, then the Mysteries will be valid.

Much discretion is required when priests have impediments. Careful attention must be given to avoid public scandal through indiscriminate and sudden severe measures, which may also bring turmoil to the family of the priest. If he must cease celebrating the Divine Liturgy, the suspension should take place discretely, to avoid causing

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more harm than good to the faithful. The obstacles he might have are known to him and to God; but if he is suspended immediately, the faithful and his family will start wondering why and the damage will be greater.

I know that sometimes God will allow even pious clerics to suffer various ailments – a bleeding nose, a stomach ache and so on – which will prevent them from celebrating the Liturgy; something similar could happen to priests who are facing a problem, and allow them to cease serving the Liturgy without embarrassment. Occasionally a priest in this situation will come to see me at my *Kalyvi* and it's clear to me that the poor soul must cease serving. Sometimes, however, his bishop may have a different opinion. In which case, what can I say? We can only pray for God's intervention.

I remember, once, I had talked to a priest and prepared him for ceasing service. But then, when he informed his Spiritual Father and his bishop, they disagreed. So, he remained an active priest despite the problem he was facing. Some time later he was struck by a car. The priest was walking on the pavement, when a car got off the street, ran him over and left him dead on the spot! *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*![2]

Our Orthodox Church is not in any way defective. Whatever defects there might be, are caused by us when we misrepresent the Church; and this can happen at all levels, from the highest levels of the hierarchy to that of the simple layman. The chosen may be few, but this is not a reason for concern. The Church is the Church of Christ, and He is the One Who governs Her. The Church

2. Heb 10:31.

is not a Temple built with stones, sand and mortar by the faithful, and destroyed by the fire of barbarians. The Church is Christ Himself. *And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one, it will crush him.*[3]

Christ is tolerating the present state of things. Divine Grace is merciful and remains active for the sake of our people. We are going through a storm, but the sun will come out again; things will begin to clear up; this situation will not last forever. It's written in the Gospel, *A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not quench; He will faithfully bring forth justice.*[4] Christ said this so that we have no excuse on the Day of Judgment. You see when the oil lamp is running out of oil and there's only a little oil left in the wick, it may flicker for a while, but it will not last long. In the end it will go off. It is like a dying person's last glimmer. But Christ does not want to blow at it and put it out because then it might say, "Had you not blown at me, I would still be burning." This way Christ will say, "I did not put you out! Your cup ran out of oil!" He will not touch a cracked reed either, because if it breaks, it will protest, "You touched me and I broke to pieces!" To which His answer would be, "But you were cracked and would break anyway, why do you blame me?"

When we, Monks and Clergy, do not live according to the Gospel, we end up spreading atheism. The world is in need of our virtues not of our vices. The example set by monks makes such a big difference in the lives of lay

3. Mt 21:44.
4. Cf. Is 42:3; Mt 12:20.

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people! They will look for all kinds of excuses to justify their sins and that's why we must be very careful. You see, we cannot say after Christ, *Which of you convicts me of sin*?[5] But what we can say is, "Which of you convicts me of scandal?" What Christ said, He said because He is perfect God and perfect Man. We are all human. We have all kinds of flaws, and downfalls, you name it, but we should not cause scandal to others.

I remember what a general told me once: "If I had not received the faith from my mother, I would have lost it, when I went to Cyprus during the hostilities. There was a man, a member of the Church, who was yelling on the phone, 'Slaughter the Turks' with no apparent reason, when, in fact, the opposite order had been issued: 'Do not harm the Turks!' " Take another example. Many of the refugees who came to Greece from *Pharasa* in Asia Minor ended up being misled by certain heresies that had appeared at that time, because they would see so many priests and bishops who had no piety whatsoever. They were scandalized, because the people they saw going to Church did not live a spiritual life. Back in *Pharasa*, things were very different. And therefore when the Evangelicals showed up claiming, "We live according to the Gospel," the poor refugees were misled.

But if a bishop, a priest or a monk is at fault, it is not Christ Who should be blamed. And yet, that's what people do. "Isn't he a representative of Christ?" they ask. Yes, but is Christ pleased with this man? Do they even consider what awaits these representatives in the next life? You see, those who are scandalized by problems in

5. Jn 8:46.

the Church and end up losing their faith, don't realize that blaming the Church for the mistakes of one priest is like blaming the state for the mistakes of a policeman. Those among them who have a good disposition will appreciate this point when it is explained to them. Many form opinions out of ignorance, because no one has helped them understand the issue, and in this sense you could say that their reaction is justified.

– Geronda, how come no one has come forward to denounce all these Church scandals?

– It is not possible to come forward on all ecclesiastical matters; there are situations that make this very difficult. It's even possible that one will patiently tolerate a situation until God shows him the right course of action. Tolerating a situation that is not right and accepting it for what it is are two very different things. When we run into such problems, it's important that we have the guts to speak the truth and do so respectfully, instead of issuing insults and going public with our disdain. It's best that we talk privately to the person at fault, with love and compassion, and draw his attention to certain things. One is not sincere and straightforward who speaks the truth in your face and makes it public, but one who has love and a truly authentic life, and who speaks discreetly, when necessary, and says what must be said at the right time.

Those who will reprimand indiscreetly suffer from spiritual confusion and malice; they see others as mere blocks of wood. And while they strike at them without mercy, they themselves feel pleased to have beaten their opponents into "cubic square". Only in a person under the influence of a leading demon it is justifiable to ridicule people publically, to reveal their past (only those of course

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upon whom the devil has rights) in order to unsettle weak souls. It's natural for the unclean spirit to reveal the vices of people; it never exposes their virtues. But those who have overcome their passions and have no malice left in them will correct evil with goodness. If they see a filthy spot that is difficult to remove, they will go and put a cover on it, so that those who see it may not be repulsed. By contrast those who spend their time sorting out garbage resemble chickens…

Nowadays[6] the devil is putting smudges on everything he can find and spreads confusion everywhere, but in the end he will fall on his face. In due time, the righteous will shine for all to see. It will be dark, so dark that even if they have a little bit of virtue, they will stand out and people will see the light and turn to them for help. Those who today are causing all these scandals will feel great shame when this comes to pass – if they are still around.

Confronting Ecclesiastical Issues

– Geronda, which is the right way to confront difficult ecclesiastical issues?

– We must avoid extremes; extreme solutions will never solve a problem. In the old days, the grocer would add little by little with the scoop on the scale to find the exact amount and get the right balance. He would avoid adding or removing something abruptly. Extreme views, no matter on what side, are always a source of trouble for Mother Church, but also for those who hold them, because, in the end, both will suffer. It's like having a

6. This was said in 1974.

possessed person, full of spiritual insolence (contempt for everything), pulling on one end, and a narrow-minded fool, zealous in his ignorance, pulling on the other. This is a confrontation, in other words, between a foolish zealot and a man steeped in spiritual arrogance. And the two bicker and strike at each other, because what is missing from both is divine Grace. And the worst that could happen, God forbid, is that there will be no end to their bickering; one end will keep on striking at the other, with no end in sight. But those who will take these extremes in order to bend them and bring them together – in harmony – will be crowned by Jesus Christ with two unfading crowns.

We must be careful not to create problems in the Church, or magnify the small indiscretions that take place here and there, because this will only make things worse and give pleasure to the devil. The person who gets overly upset and angry at the sight of a minor mistake and rushes head on supposedly to put things in order, resembles the foolish sacristan, who sees a candle dripping and rushes head on to put it out, knocking over people and candle stands in his way and causing an even greater disorder during worship. Unfortunately, we have so many people keen on disturbing Mother Church these days! The educated among them have only an intellectual grasp of the dogmas; they don't approach them in the spirit of our Holy Fathers. And the uneducated are not far behind; they have grasped the dogmas with their teeth only, and that's why they cannot discuss ecclesiastical matters without grinding their teeth at each other. As a result, they cause greater harm to the Church than the enemies of our Orthodox faith. A torrential river is not good, because it

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will sweep away logs, rocks, even people; but a shallow river is not good either, because it will become a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Then there are those who spend their time criticizing each other instead of working for the common good. Instead of keeping an eye on themselves and their behaviour, they watch for mistakes in others. They are on the look out for what others will say or write, and they are ready to strike at them without mercy; of course, they could be writing or saying the exact same thing themselves, and supporting it with all kinds of references to Sacred Scripture and the Fathers. These people cause great harm, because on the one hand, they do injustice to their brothers and sisters while on the other, they undermine them before the faithful. And these actions also end up scandalizing and sowing unbelief in weak souls. Those who may justify their malice by claiming their right to correct others instead of concentrating on their own faults, or those who go public with Church problems – even matters too sensitive to discuss – on the principle of *tell it to the Church*,[7] should do two things. First, they should examine their own little "church", their families or their Brotherhood, and only if these pass the test, if they prove good, they should go ahead and embarrass Mother Church. Good children, I believe, will never bring charges against their mother.

Everyone is useful in the Church. Every person has something to offer; there's plenty of room for everybody, for those who have a mild character and for those who may be strict and demanding. The Body of the Church

7. Mt 18:17.

resembles the human body. Just as we need both sweet and sour foods, even bitter herbs, because each food has something to contribute in substance and vitamins, so too the Body of the Church needs every one of us. Each person complements the character of the other, and we are all obliged to tolerate not only the spiritual temperament of others, but also their human weaknesses. Now, unfortunately, there are those who have irrational expectations from other people. They expect everyone to be like them, to have their spiritual temperament; and if the other person does not meet their standard, if they are a bit more lenient or more austere, they are eager to find them non spiritual.

High Office and Vainglory

I wonder how some people can attach so much importance to human glory and ignore the glory of God which awaits us, when "we shall depart from the glory of men." What will it really benefit us if we gain the highest office and the admiration of everybody? Where will this admiration lead us? Heaven or hell? Remember what Christ said? *I do not receive glory from men.*[8] What would it benefit me, a monk, to become a priest-monk, a bishop or a patriarch? Would these offices help me save my soul or would they become a burden on my weak shoulders and send me crashing into hell? If there were no next life, perhaps we could find a way to justify such nonsense But he who is seeking the salvation of his soul will not

8. Jn 5:41.

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seek high office; he *counts all things as refuse, in order to gain Christ.*[9]

Moses was sent by God to free the people of Israel, but he never made it to the Promised Land, because he was so frustrated with his people, that be became indignant with God. For years he was facing their complaints and then one day, he could not take it anymore. "They are asking for water," he said. "Where am I supposed to find water for them?"[10] What do you mean where? Only a few days ago, you struck at the rock and water gushed out and you gave them to drink! Was that so hard to do? But he was so tangled up in the concerns of his people that he forgot how much water was provided earlier, and with all these things on his mind, he did not realize his mistake so as to seek forgiveness from God. That's all he had to do and God would have forgiven him. But he did not, and God's answer, the rule He gave to Moses, was a reprimand for his indignation. Moses, of course, was received by God into Paradise and God honoured him when He sent him together with the Prophet Elijah to Mount Tabor, at the Lord's Transfiguration. This should help us understand that high office and its responsibilities is a great obstacle in the Christian's journey toward Paradise.

Some people, for whom God has provided no responsibilities whatsoever, will nevertheless seek duties and high office, and when they don't get them, they become irate and end up wearing out their soul, God's very temple, as we read in Saint Paul's Epistle to the

9. Cf. Php 3:8.
10. Cf. Num 20:10 f.

Corinthians.[11] And while Jesus Christ is preparing for them a heavenly glory, they try to enter Paradise through vainglory, the glory of this world.

Perhaps some of you might object, "Why is it that some people who are glorified in the world, are also glorified by God?" Well, if you want to know the truth, those who seek human glory will never be glorified by God. We should never seek responsibilities on our own. Rather, we should rejoice when relieved from them, and worried when they become too many. If we don't react this way, it means that somewhere inside, pride is working secretly to undermine us. We should never pursue high office for the sake of glory, because this is a symptom of a really sick soul. It shows that we are marching on a sick path, a path other than that of humility that brought the Holy Fathers to Paradise.

So many of our Holy Fathers have avoided the responsibilities of high office; they did not wish to become an abbot, a priest or hierarch. Some would even go as far as mutilating a hand, a nose, an ear, or a tongue, and in this way be disqualified for ordination. Others had to be ordained from above their cell, after the roof was removed, while there were those, like Saint Amphilochios, who were ordained from a distance. It's not that these men lacked in education or holiness; they had both. But they had realized how important the soul is and how the responsibilities of office become a burden and an obstacle in the salvation of the soul. For this reason they avoided high office. And so they set themselves on the right path.

11. Cf. I Cor 3:16.

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Even on the Holy Mountain there are those who consider priesthood as an obstacle to the spiritual life, because, in addition to the many responsibilities they typically have, they are also obliged to accompany a bishop when he pays a visit, or attend various feasts and celebrations which may be spiritual in nature, but still do not bring peace to the monastic soul.

When I was at the *Coenobium,* I met a deacon who had grown old and died a deacon. When he was still a young monk, the Monastery needed a deacon and so they went ahead and ordained him. Later younger monks arrived. While they became deacons and priests, he remained a deacon, giving his turn to everybody else. When they urged him to become a priest, he would say, "The Monastery does not need another priest. We have our younger Brothers for that, thank God." Later, he was assigned to the office. But then, when educated monks joined the Monastery, he asked to be relieved of his duties. When the Monastery was going through rough times, this devout deacon pleaded with a virtuous priest to accept the position of abbot. The priest responded, "Here you are, avoiding any kind of responsibility and putting the full load on me! When you become the supervisor, I will become the abbot." And that's actually what happened. When the troubles were over and the Monastery prospered, he once again gave his resignation. This deacon was such a great help to me; he was full of God's Grace. The Holy Community of the Holy Mountain would always go to him when there were difficult matters to resolve; they wanted his enlightened opinion.

– Geronda, what drives spiritual people, who have no interest whatsoever in money, to go after glory? Were the

ancient Greeks right in saying that, "Money has been despised by many, glory by no one"?[12]

– It's their empty head that drives them! It's all about vainglory. The saying, "Money has been despised by many ..." reflects the attitude of people who live in the world. Ancient Greeks thought this way because they did not know the true God. There is no room in the spiritual life for vainglory. Has anyone been denigrated more than Christ was? The Fathers would seek dishonour and God would instead honour them. Those who crave for glory are still living in the world. They're playing soccer and cheering the home team: "PAOK – AEK – DOXA (Glory)"![13] When we read about glory in the Gospel, it's a glory that is full of love and humility. *Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee... And this is life eternal, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent.*[14] What Christ was asking of God was to allow people to know their Saviour and be saved. But today what they care about the most is finding glory wherever they can. They look for glory here and glory there and in the end, it's folly they find ... folly here, folly there. This is what Christ meant when He said, *How can ye believe, who receive glory from one another, and seek not the glory that comes from the only God?*[15] And Saint Paul says, *But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*[16] These

12. A saying of Kleovoulos, tyrant of the ancient city of Lindos. Rhodes, and one of the Seven Sages of antiquity (6th century B.C.).
13. PAOK, AEK and DOXA (glory) are three Greek soccer teams.
14. Jn 17:1-3.
15. Jn 5:44.
16. II Tm 3:13.

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things make my stomach turn. I could not survive in such an environment even for twenty-four hours.

Responsibilities can be a great obstacle to the spiritual life. Those who are engaged in spiritual warfare will stay away from them. People who pursue high office and supervising posts do not end well. Egoism and personal issues get in the way and supervisors clash and fight with each other, because all they can think about is their own selves. But those who work with *philotimo* and remove the self from their work, and avoid making themselves comfortable at all times, these people will be able to help others; for it is only when the self is not involved, that needy souls will find rest in the help they receive, and those who help them will find inner peace both in this life and in the life to come.

In the old days, the Holy Fathers would depart for the desert where they would struggle to be emptied of all their passions. Without any plans or designs of their own, they would put their life in God's hands and avoid high office and authority, even when they reached holiness. Only when the Mother Church needed them, they would obey God's will and accept offices, glorifying the name of God with their holy lives. These men became spiritual blood donors; having achieved a high level of spiritual health in the desert, on a good spiritual diet and under the direct supervision of the Fathers, they would then give their "blood" to those in need.

The Administration of the Church

The Orthodox Church was always administered by Synods. According to the Orthodox spirit, the Church is

administered by Synods and the Monasteries by the Assembly of Elders. Decisions are reached jointly by the archbishop and the Synod, and by the abbot or abbess and the Assembly of Senior monastics. The archbishop is first among equals. And the Patriarch is not a Pope; he and the other hierarchs have the same rank. While the Pope's rank is different – he sits up high and others kiss his feet – the Patriarch sits together will all the other hierarchs and his work is to coordinate. This is also the relationship between an abbot or abbess and the members of the Assembly of Elders; they are first among equals.

An archbishop or an abbot cannot do anything they want. God will enlighten the mind of a hierarch on one issue and the mind of an Elder on another. It works like it did with the four Evangelists who complemented each other. Here too, each person will state his opinion, and if someone disagrees, his dissent will be recorded in the minutes. Especially in cases where a decision is contrary to the commandments of the Gospel, those who disagree should have their dissent recorded, for otherwise it will appear as if the decision was unanimous. If this person signs the document without recording his objection, he has actually caused harm and stands to blame. But if he makes his opinion public, even if the majority disagrees, he will be in good standing with God. When the Synod and the Assembly of Elders do not function well, the Orthodox spirit gives way and the papist spirit takes over. It's in the nature of the Orthodox spirit that each and every person has the right to speak his mind; no one should refrain from speaking out of fear or in order to flatter a superior, or because they want to be in good terms with the archbishop or the abbot.

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When clergymen enter Church administration at a young age, even when qualified, they stand to be harmed and to waste their time. They will get caught up in the wheels of administration, of clerical work and so on, and will receive little spiritual assistance, even though they may have great potential. Especially in some cases, it is sad to see that if these men had worked on their spiritual life, they would one day become great assets for the Mother Church. When we are not concerned about our spiritual state, in the good sense of concern, we resemble merchants who buy and sell without keeping an account of how much they owe, until one day they end up bankrupt and in jail.

I get really sad when I hear of young priests working in an office. If they were kept out of administration a while longer, they would be helped a lot later in life. But unfortunately this happens quite frequently; instead of older, experienced priests who would be able to work spiritually with their flock, they appoint inexperienced young priests, and the damage is double. What I am trying to say is that young men take on responsibilities without adequate spiritual preparation, and find themselves, with little spiritual wealth, in very demanding posts. On the other hand, older priests are not given any responsibilities and as a result have no opportunity to share their valuable experience and the enlightenment they have received from God.

The Divine Liturgy

– Geronda, when the Divine Liturgy is celebrated should there always be someone who will receive Holy Communion?

– Yes, because that's the purpose of the Divine Liturgy, even if few are ready. All the prayers refer to the faithful who will be receiving Communion. For this reason, there must be at least one person present and able to receive Communion. Of course, once in a while, there may be no one ready to receive Communion; but that's not really the issue. At least someone, even a small child, a baby, should receive Communion. And when there is no one to receive Holy Communion, then the Liturgy is celebrated for the priest himself to receive Communion and to commemorate the names of the living and the departed. And of course, this should be the exception and not the rule.

We get to live through the events of the New Testament at every Divine Liturgy. The Holy *Prothesis* is Bethlehem, the Holy Altar is the Holy Sepulchre, and the Crucifix is the Holy Golgotha. All of creation is sanctified by the Divine Liturgy through the presence of Christ. The Divine Liturgy sustains the world! What God has given us is so awesome! And we are so unworthy of it! There are priests who live this awesome Mystery at every Divine Liturgy. A priest once told me something that a very simple and good priest had once confessed to him, "I have such a hard time during the *catalysis* (the consumption of the Holy Gifts at the end of the Divine Liturgy). My filthy tears fall into the Chalice; I can't contain them, and this makes me so upset." And as he was speaking these words he was crying! So the other priest told him "Please Father, ask Christ to give some of those 'filthy' tears to me too."

– Geronda, why do you step down from the *stasidi*[17] when the priest says the prayers of preparation before the

17. A *stasidi* (pl. *stasidia*) is a Church seat in an Orthodox Church.

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Iconostasis, prior to entering the Altar to put on his holy vestments?

– I step down because as the priest is praying, God is sending him divine Grace, to rid him of his weaknesses and allow him to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. At this time, the faithful should also be praying with reverence, so that they may receive Grace.

The Divine Liturgy begins with the *Proskomide*, the Service of Preparation of the Holy Gifts. It's amazing how God will sometimes allow us to understand and experience the Holy Mysteries! When I was the *ecclesiasticos*, something happened to me. Once, as the priest was cutting the *Prosphoron* (the offering bread) and saying the words, *As a sheep He was led to the slaughter*, I heard the quivering of a lamb on the holy *Diskarion*. And again, when he said *Sacrificed is the Lamb [and Son] of God, Who takes away the sin of the world* ..., I heard the bleating of a lamb coming from the holy *Prothesis*! How awesome! This is why I tell priests not to prepare the *Proskomide* by cutting the *Prosphoron* ahead of time and then simply placing the *Amnos*, the Lamb, upon the *Diskarion*. Rather, they should be making the actual incisions on the *Prosphoron*, as they are saying the words, *As a sheep He was led to the slaughter*... They should take the Lance and sacrifice the Lamb as they are saying the appropriate words, *Sacrificed is the Lamb of God*...

When the priest rings the little bell at the time of the *Proskomide*, and while you are silently commemorating the names of people, your heart should participate in the pain of every soul you mention, living or departed. You should bring to mind the general problems faced by people and then more specifically those persons that you have in

mind, saying something like "For Maria, for Nicholas... You Lord know their problems, please help them." The names people give you should be commemorated during several Divine Liturgies, some in three, some in five, and then more. Why should some names be commemorated at all times, and others, who may be in more need, not commemorated at all? That's difficult for me to understand. Although names of non-Orthodox Christians should not be commemorated at the *Prothesis* and placed on the *Diskarion*, we can still pray for their health and enlightenment, and even say a Supplication Service for them.

– Geronda, some priests say that they do not want to celebrate the Divine Liturgy very often; they don't want it to turn into a routine.

– That's not right. A priest should not be making such statements. It is like saying, "I don't visit my relatives often, because I want them to miss me, and give me a warmer welcome when I visit." However, appropriate preparation is needed before celebrating the Divine Liturgy. Holy Communion will cure and sanctify the person who struggles spiritually. But how can it possibly help those who do not make the effort? What will be there for Christ to transform, if we do nothing?

Once, in the Cave of Saint Athanasios, there lived an Elder with two monks under his guidance. One was a priest-monk and the other a deacon-monk. So, one day, the two monks went to a Chapel to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. The priest was envious of the deacon, and despised him, because he was smarter and more capable than him in every respect. But the deacon also did not help the situation with his rather arrogant manner. The priest was prepared; he had done all the necessary things,

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he had read the preparatory prayers for Holy Communion and so on. But unfortunately, he had left out the most important preparation, the one that happens internally. He had not confessed his faults with humility in order to dispel any malice and envy that he harboured in his heart, things that will not go away by simply changing our clothes and washing our face. And so, being only externally prepared, he approached the awesome and Holy Altar to celebrate the Liturgy. And then as soon as he started the *Proskomide*, guess what happened? All of a sudden, a loud noise was heard and he saw the Holy *Diskarion* move away from the *Prothesis* and disappear. Of course they were not able to celebrate the Liturgy. My mind tells me that something terrible would have happened to those two monks if God had not intervened in this manner to prevent them from celebrating the Liturgy, being, as they were, in such a spiritual state.

– Geronda, if something happens during the Divine Liturgy, can it be interrupted?

– No, it cannot. When the Divine Liturgy is in progress, the priest cannot interrupt it, no matter what happens. Even if war is declared, he must go on until it is over. Even if the enemy is surrounding the Church, the most he can do is hurry up and finish. With God's help, he will be able to do that. But he must trust in God and not be afraid.

Priests who celebrate the Mysteries of the Lord should be most watchful, pure and exacting. For priests are more exalted than the Angels. The holy Angels will cover their face during the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, while the priest, with his face uncovered, will be celebrating it.

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His message

First we believe in God and then we love God and His image, the man. Faith increases with prayers. "Add us faith".

"As i have realised all evil comes from unfaithfulness. When someone doesn't believe in God he wants to have fun. So he falls into every kind of sin".

"People must understand the deepest meaning of life that is, that this life is given to prepare us for the future life. The people must find a guide, a religius guide, as the ones who need a guide when they travels. Then with the help of the religius guide people will programme their life, with a little study, a little prayer and avoiding the causes of sin and the wordly thinking which is the worst of all. So their heart will be devoted to Christ".

"We must wrestle with mettle to save ourselves and not to pain Christ. Christ will tell us "My child i have done so many things to save you. I have shed my blood and i have gone through passion, what have you done to save yourself?"

"Each person must find his inclination. The hard-working person, either in married life or in monastic, will be successful".

"We should prefer sadness and accept it more than we accept happiness. The bitter medicine is usually better than the sweet because it cures. Real happiness springs from pain".

"What prevents people from succeding in his spiritual life is the fact that he uses his brain not to improve his spiritual life but to do other things".

"We must feel the pain for our present state to be able to pray with all our heart".

"Now it is the time to seperate the kids from the lambs, the faithful fom the unfaithful. Later there will be time when we take examinations and

suffer persecation for our faith and copper will be separated from gold".

"When somebody is troubled because he suffers for other, cares for other, makes their problems his own problems then he will get the pay of a martyr. How lovely are the people who sacrifice everything! They don't have any problems and their face shines because they are filled with God's joy".

"The basis of our spiritual life is to think of the others first and then of ourselves. When we get into the others place and understand them then we are related to Christ".

"God's grace is an expensive thing. It must find the person who spiritually agrees with God to come and stay in his heart. And of course the person must work hard to get it, while we want God's grace to come and release us from weaknesses without struggling for it".

"It takes lots of sacrifice, self denial, modesty mettle to make the Holy Ghost come and stay in people's hearts. Spiritual life isn't enjoyment. Christ has put the plug but our wires are rusty and they don't get God's grace. We should remove the rust from our wires, struggle to know ourselves, stop passions and get the virtues to make God's grace visit us".

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